

# Rutherford County

# Work First Plan

## October 1, 2003 - September 30, 2005

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## **I. Conditions within the County**

In the last 4 years Rutherford County has experienced the loss of approximately 4600 jobs. The county has also had several plant closings. Since that time, approximately 300 jobs have been added through one textile manufacturer, one truck axle manufacturer and expansion efforts of a few other industries. The average labor force for Rutherford County for the calendar year 2001 was 28,640. Unemployment insurance rates, since October 2001, ranged from a low of 10.3% to a high of 12.6%. The average UI rate for 2001 was 8.4%. (Based on information from Employment Security Commission Market Division)

The most pressing problem for Work First participants in relation to employment is the workforce they compete with for available jobs which negatively impacts employment potential for this group. They tend to have a poorer, less stable work history and fewer employability skills. This usually results in having to accept lower paying jobs which limits self-sustainability.

The current economic conditions remain relatively stable due to a slightly stronger economy. The Economic Development Director and Commission continue to actively recruit potential employers but have no definite prospects locating in the local area. There are no anticipated layoffs or plant closings at this time.

Currently Rutherford County has a Work First caseload of 447, of which 202 are child only cases. Census data indicates that 29.60% of the adult population does not have a high school diploma. (See Attachment I. US Census Bureau Quickfacts for Rutherford County)

The most pressing problems facing our participants are:

### **A. Transportation**

- Rutherford County has a limited transportation system to serve a large geographic area.

### **B. Child Care**

- Rutherford County has a waiting list currently for childcare due to funds being limited and childcare costs rising.

### **C. Substance Abuse**

- It is estimated that 35% to 45% of welfare recipients are substance abusers with a dual-diagnosis.

#### D. Unskilled Workers

- Most of our participants start with and stay at entry-level jobs. Some employers only hire temporary employees without benefits.

## II. Planning Process

### A. Planning Committee

The Rutherford County Planning Committee consisted of the following members:

Gene Adair	Rutherford County Transit
John Carroll	Rutherford County DSS, Director
Denise B. Clemmer	Social Work Supervisor
Dale Day	Employment Security Commission
Franklin Goode	County Commissioner Chairman, DSS Board
Chuck Flack	Business Representative
Cindy Harris	Employment Social Worker, Rfd. Co. DSS
Lynn Hoppes	Social Work Supervisor (Investigations) Rfd. Co. DSS
Kelly Hudson	Family Resources (PATH)
Robin Lattimore	Rutherford County Schools (CAMP)
Tim Mathis	Rutherford LifeServices
Bill Robertson	Isothermal Planning and Development Commission
Rick Watson	Rutherford Center
Helen White	Rutherford County Health Department

### B. Public Comment

Public review was held October 1, 2002 to October 4, 2002. On October 7, 2002 the County Commissioners held a public comment period and voted on this plan. The public comment period was announced via newspaper.

### C. Planning Process

The Work First Planning Committee met on September 13, 2002 to discuss the plan's development and the process for the continued collaboration and coordination to carry out the plan. Committee members identified the needs of the Work First participants and identified issues to be addressed. Members gave general directions and guidance for the plan. Several members took on specific areas to bring back to the group. On September 19, 2002 the committee met and discussed some of the information that was given to them at the previous meeting and charged the DSS staff to develop the plan. On September 27, 2002 the group was submitted a draft of the plan for approval. The committee approved the plan with some modifications.

Most of the committee members serve on several boards or committees together, such as Joblink Management Team, Success Team, Smart Start, Even Start, Head Start and the Work Force Development Commission. DSS and these agencies will continue to discuss the implementation and success of the plan as the year progresses.

### **III. Outcomes and goals for the County**

#### **A. Statewide Work First Goals**

1. Employment
2. Meeting Federal Participation Rates
3. Providing Employment Services
4. Benefit Diversion
5. Staying off Welfare
6. Child Support
7. Job Retention
8. Caseload Reduction

#### **B. County Developed Outcome Goals**

1. Employment-Rutherford County's goal is to place 125 participants in employment.
2. Meeting Federal Participant Rates - Rutherford County will meet the all-family participation rate of 50% and the two-parent family participation rate of 90%.
3. Providing Employment Services - Rutherford County will work intensely with 75% of the all family and 100% of the two parent families in employment services.
4. Benefit Diversion - Rutherford County will meet this goal by diverting 119 cases through Benefit Diversion.
5. Staying off Welfare - Rutherford County will maintain a recidivism rate of 85% of Work First participants who leave for employment.
6. Child Support - Rutherford County will increase collections by 4% and obtain 3% more orders.
7. Job Retention - Rutherford County will meet this goal by helping 60% of the Work First population retain their employment at the 6-month mark and 50% to retain their employment at 12 months.
8. Caseload Reduction - Rutherford County's goal is to have 178 adult cases by the end of the fiscal year, a decrease of 24 cases.

### **IV. Plans to Achieve the Outcomes and Goals**

#### **A. and B. Activities and Supportive Services**

- Employment

Work First staff is knowledgeable about all community resources and programs available to our participants. The eligibility staff and the case management staff work as a team to meet the needs of the participants. Staff refer individuals to Medicaid and to Food Stamps within our agency, as well as the Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor who is in our office each week. Rutherford County's JobLink has been up and running for 2 years and two of the Employment Social Workers are stationed there part time. This aids us in referring participants to the JobLink when one of our workers is there to help them specifically with their situation. Also at the JobLink are other partners to help with the employment issues that face our participants such as, WIA, Rutherford LifeServices, ESC, Isothermal Community College, VR and Rutherford County Schools. With the current population of Work First individuals having many barriers to employment the cooperation of our agency with the local VR office has helped overcome some of these barriers. Both agencies provide case management and employment related services, with VR also providing Vocational Evaluation; Situational Assessment; Vocational Adjustment Training; and Paid Work Experience. Rutherford LifeServices provides additional resources for our participants. (See attachment II for Service Agreement with Rutherford LifeServices) The services provided include, but are not limited to: job readiness activities; employment activities (paid and unpaid); job placement services; job retention services; and support services. Employment Social Workers will continue to refer participants who have been unable to find paid employment to work experience sites. These sites will provide meaningful duties that have relevance to the local labor market.

- Meeting Federal Participation Rates

Rutherford County will schedule each participant, brought into the Employment Program, to meet the federal participation rate within the 12-week time requirement. For two parent cases both parents will be brought in within the 12-week requirement. Both will assess the potential for at least one of the parents to obtain employment. For all two-parent cases benefit diversion will be explored and utilized whenever possible.

- Providing Employment Services

All participants will be assessed by the Employment Social Work staff to evaluate their employability. The participants will see the ESW staff within the required 12-week period at which time their case will be opened in EPIS. All participants will have some type of activity that they are required to do or follow through on, even if they are considered disabled. They may be referred to VR, Mental Health, file for their disability, or get their GED or High School Diploma. All individuals will be assisted with participation expenses as they arise such as uniforms, transportation, and day care.

- Benefit Diversion

Both the Employment Social Worker and the Income Maintenance Worker will evaluate each family for Benefit Diversion. When eligible, Benefit Diversion will be provided to stabilize the family. Other services will be offered such as medical assistance and food stamps, childcare, transportation and child support.

- Staying Off Welfare

Rutherford County will provide transitional services to participants who are no longer receiving Work First, especially for the families that leave Work First due to employment. Services include retention strategies such as case management and crisis evaluation. We will use the grant from the Department of Transportation to help with retention services. Employment Social Workers will still make appropriate referrals to programs that may assist these families.

- Child Support

Work First families are immediately referred to the Child Support unit. The Child Support staff will then use all possible means to locate and establish a child support order. The child support supervisor runs a report each month to determine the status of the cases that are Work First. Work First staff and Child Support will work closely together to meet the goals set by the state.

- Job Retention

As stated previously Rutherford County will continue to assist families that leave Work First due to employment. All Work First staff are knowledgeable about the programs that are available for families and do numerous referrals on their behalf. It is our goal to meet the state recommendation and keep 60 % of the families employed at the 6 month mark and 50% of the families employed at the 1 year mark. This will not be an easy task, as it will take the effort of numerous individuals working together and pooling resources.

- Caseload Reduction

Rutherford County will emphasize employment and provide supportive services to enable families to achieve self-sufficiency through our Work First Program. We will offer Benefit Diversion when appropriate to enable families to get on their feet and negate the need for a monthly Work First check. Referrals will be made to other services such as emergency assistance, food assistance, Medicaid, Low Income Energy and the Crisis Intervention Program. Referrals will also be made to outside agencies when necessary to assist families.

## **V. Administration**

### **A. Authority**

The Rutherford County Board of Commissioners, who has authority for the Work First Program, has delegated the administration duties to the Rutherford County Department of Social Services.

### **B. Organization**

Upon applying for cash assistance, the family will be assessed for immediate need which includes: Benefit Diversion, Emergency Assistance, Referral to service intake for social work services, including child protective services, and Referral to child support services. The applicant is also referred to the food assistance program and Medicaid. Families are also referred for day care services if needed. A requirement for cash assistance includes registration with the Employment Security Commission located in Forest City. The family will also be given a substance abuse screening.

Rutherford County participates in the JobLink Center located in Forest City. Work First Social Workers are co-located one full day per week at the Center. ESC provides employment case management staff. Vocational Rehabilitation, Isothermal Community College, Department of Labor, Rutherford LifeServices, Rutherford County School System and WIA are also present. VR is currently co-located in our agency one day per week.

The Work First Social Worker will assess the applicant for appropriate services that will lead to self-sufficiency. Both the Income Maintenance staff and the Employment Social Workers have the knowledge to do Emergency Assistance and CIP applications.

At redeterminations, the Work First caseworker will reassess the case for continuing eligibility for cash assistance.

The Work First Social Worker will work intensely with priority cases including two-parent households and families who have used 18 of their 24 months and 40 of their 60 months.

Quarterly reviews will be conducted on all Work First cases for continued employment services including childcare and transportation services.

### **C. First Stop**

The point of registration in Rutherford County for the First Stop Employment program shall be at the office of the Employment Security Commission located in Forest City. (See attachment III - Memorandum of Understanding.) The application is made for Work First and the applicant has 10 days to register for First Stop. When this is completed the



application will continue to be processed. Failure to register for First Stop results in the application being denied.

#### D. Child Care

In the past we have been fortunate in Rutherford County that our childcare allocation has been adequate to accommodate all of the county's childcare need. Presently, due to funding issues, we have been forced to maintain a day care waiting list. Our current target populations are as follows:

1. Child Protective Services/Special Needs Children
2. Employed families who are:
  - Foster Parents
  - Work First Participants
  - Families working at least 30 hours a week
  - Part time employment
3. Child Welfare Services
4. Children with Developmental Delays
5. Parents involved in education and training

#### E. Transportation

Rutherford County views this as one of the major obstacles to employment for our Work First families. We offer a \$50.00 stipend to aid participants with their transportation cost. We will assist in seeking transportation but leave the primary responsibility to each participating family. It is our belief that the individual needs to assume some of these duties themselves in order for them to become self-sufficient.

The Director of the Department of Social Services serves on the County's Transportation Committee. The Rutherford County Transit system is currently running two public bus routes a day. These routes consist of thirty-eight stops in the areas of Forest City, Spindale and Rutherfordton. In addition to these routes, which run twice a day, seven days a week, a route runs from Rutherfordton to Lake Lure and Chimney Rock, including nights when needed. This route was created to help the employers in these tourist areas bring in employees.

Rutherford County uses the DOT grant each year to assist Work First families or families under 200% of the poverty level with transportation expenses. The assistance is continued for three months if the individual is employed. Approximately \$20,000.00 of the Work First Block Grant has been designated for transportation cost. This is also offered as a stipend to the families.

#### F. Substance Abuse Services

The Rutherford County Work First initiative will involve a collaborative effort of the Rutherford-Polk Area MH/DD/SA (Area Program) and the Rutherford County

Department of Social Services (DSS). This collaborative effort will assist in assuring the needs of the local community.

As a part of the Work First Substance Abuse Initiative, the Area Program will provide access to and services from a Qualified Substance Abuse Professional (QSAP) to the local DSS office. The purpose of this service will be to conduct initial screenings for individuals identified through the Work First program as in need of further evaluation. Substance abuse services provided by the Area Program shall include but not be limited to: screening, assessment, treatment planning, referral to other treatment services to include inpatient and residential treatment as well as other local community-based services provided by the Area Program. Services provided to individuals through the Area Program shall be based upon assessment of a QSAP using nationally recognized criteria. The American Society of Addiction Medicine (ASAM) is recognized by the State of North Carolina as the standard of assessment criteria for consumers with substance abuse disorders.

#### Protocols for Substance Abuse Services:

##### Substance Abuse Screenings:

All persons applying for the Work First Program will be administered an approved initial substance abuse screening instrument by the Work First DSS staff. Should the results of this screening detect a possible substance abuse issue, the DSS staff person will initiate a referral to the Area program's Substance Abuse Professional (QSAP). The QSAP will conduct further interview of the Work First participant to determine existence of a substance abuse disorder. The Area Program will provide assistance and consultation to the DSS staff regarding conducting initial screenings.

##### Substance Abuse Assessments:

During the interview with the Work First participant, the QSAP will conduct a substance abuse assessment. The assessment will include a clinical interview with the participant as well as administration of an approved assessment tool such as the SASSI.

##### Treatment Planning:

When the QSAP determines as a result of the assessment that the participant has a substance abuse disorder the QSAP will begin the treatment planning. Determination of the course of treatment will be based upon criteria defined by ASAM.

##### Case Management:

If the QSAP determines that ancillary services are required (assistance with housing, financial, vocational, medical needs), the QSAP will initiate a referral for Case Management.

##### Work First Substance Abuse Treatment Options

The Work First Substance Abuse initiative will include a treatment component. Following identification of a substance abuse disorder, the QSAP will apply ASAM

criteria and make recommendations for treatment. The following treatment options will be used based upon the severity of the identified problem.

- Outpatient Group Services: Are provided locally by the Area Program. Group content includes psycho-educational and process components. Group services are tiered based upon identified consumer need and are further delineated as follows:
  - A). 16 Sessions (24 treatment hours) – designed for those individuals with a substance diagnosis only. Generally, participants are in the early stages of addiction.
  - B). 20 sessions (46 treatment hours) – designed for those individuals identified as in the early to middle stages of substance abuse dependence.
- Day Treatment: psychosocial treatment services for individuals with a primary diagnosis of mental illness and a co-existing substance abuse disorder. Generally, individuals who receive this treatment option have more intensive, chronic psychiatric needs that require frequent contact.
- Detoxification/ Crisis Stabilization: The individual's substance abuse assessment would dictate this level of care. Generally, this service is available to individuals experiencing acute symptoms of withdrawal requiring varying levels of care and observation. These services are provided by referral to specialized facilities under contract with or by sole referral of the Area Program.
- Inpatient Rehabilitation: are provided via referral through the area Program. Service is designed for those individuals who have not effectively responded to other less intensive treatment services. Individuals referred to this treatment option must meet diagnostic criteria for substance abuse dependence.
- Halfway House: referrals are provided to individuals for this longer-term option. Generally, this service is for individuals who have completed inpatient or intensive outpatient programs and require continued structure to maintain abstinence.

#### Treatment for Non-Compliance

When a Work First participant becomes non-compliant with treatment, the appropriate DSS staff person is notified. The determination of non-compliance will be made jointly between the DSS staff member and the local Substance Abuse treating clinician. Examples of non-compliance include, but are not limited to: excessive absenteeism, failure to obtain or successfully pass drug tests, disruptive behavior while in treatment and other behaviors that impede the participant's progress. A participant's treatment non-compliance may result in sanctions being applied under the Work First program. Benefits may be fully reinstated after the participant complies with treatment recommendations for a period of thirty (30) consecutive days and the sanction period is over.

#### Drug Screenings:

Throughout the various treatment services, Work First participants will be subject to random drug testing. In the event that a Work First participant tests positive for a drug screen, DSS will be notified. The participant may be required to complete a more intensive treatment option as a result. In the case of two (2) positive drug tests during treatment, DSS will be notified and the participant will be sanctioned for noncompliance. At the end of the sanction period, the participant will be required to successfully undergo a

drug screen. The participant must additionally comply with treatment recommendations in order for benefits to be reinstated. If this screening is unsuccessful, another sanction will be put into place. In addition, the substance abuse professional will consult with DSS regarding more intensive treatment options appropriate for the participant.

Non-Medicaid Reimbursable Services:

Room and board costs for participants in residential treatment will be secured as needed based upon availability. Housing costs related to relocation and startup will be available to qualified TANF recipients. Support for childcare may be accessed through either TANF funds or supplemental local DSS day care funds. Prevention and education will be provided to affected children through the local area program.

Optional Family Services

Any client who indicates, either during the initial DSS screening or subsequently in the QSAP evaluation, that someone in the immediate household either suffers from or is at extreme risk of a substance related disorder will be referred to a family specialist at Mental Health. A prime example would be a child in the home who has exhibited substance abuse behavior or is at very high risk of developing such. The DSS worker may make family counseling services either voluntary or mandatory. If made mandatory, treatment non-compliance provisions above will apply.

Reporting and Outcomes:

The QSAP will, in conjunction with the area program submit all data necessary as specified by the State. The QSAP will be provided access to computer equipment and Internet access in order to download and transmit information as required. Information regarding consumers will be transferred over a secure network and will be done in accordance with local area program policy.

G. Family Violence Option

Rutherford County DSS will continue to work closely with our local PATH (Prevention of Abuse in the Home) Shelter during the assessment, referral and follow-up services for victims of domestic violence. DSS social workers are trained to assist in the domestic violence areas involving both adults and children. (See attachment IV)

H. Maintenance of Effort (MOE)

Rutherford County plans to fund all Work First case management, WF eligibility and Child Protective Services Investigations, as well as client support services and activities with the MOE money. (\$422,348.00)

I. Child Welfare Services

Rutherford County will devote approximately \$200,000.00 out of the Work First Block Grant toward staff, services and activities.

## **VI. Emergency Assistance**

- Have at least one child age 17 or younger living in the home
- Kinship:  
Parent-natural mother or father, legal or alleged father, or adoptive parent, Blood, half-blood or adoptive relatives, brother, sister, grandparents, uncle, aunt, nephew, niece or first cousin
- Step-relative is limited to: step-parent, step-sister, step-brother
- There must be an unforeseen emergency - i.e. family cannot have caused the emergency in order to become eligible
- Assistance cannot be used for medical care
- Family must reside in Rutherford County with the intent of remaining in North Carolina
- The family must have monthly countable gross income equal to or below 200% of the Federal Poverty Level
- Assistance will be provided once in a 12 month consecutive period
- Maximum amount a family can receive is \$300.00
- Assistance must alleviate the emergency and prevent its reoccurrence
- Families may not receive EA if they are being penalized and or sanctioned under the Work First Program.
- Must be a US citizen or a legal alien
- Emergency must be related to families involved in keeping or securing employment
- If family has a intensive CPS case, and there is a recommendation from a Child Welfare worker, EA funds may possibly be used outside of employment emergencies
- Assistance cannot be used for heating and cooling needs.
- Countable reserve limit is \$3000.00 and liquid assets are limited to \$300.00.

## **VII. Services to low income families (under 200% of poverty)**

Rutherford County will utilize the Work First Block Grant to provide services to eligible citizens of the county. Services will be provided to families whose income does not exceed 200% of the poverty level. The employment social workers as well as the income maintenance workers will evaluate and determine eligibility for these families. Benefit Diversion and 200% of Poverty Assistance will be utilized whenever possible to prevent a Work First application. All services and resources will be explored before a cash application is taken. Services include education expenses, work related expenses, case management, various counseling, parenting skills, transportation if employed, child and family enrichment, and referrals to day care and skills training. These services may be provided for 3 months. Work First participants will be our first priority in assisting with financial resources and employment services. The 200% population will be served as funds allow and there is no harm to our WF population.

## **VIII. Services to Non-Custodial Parents**

Work First Block Grant funds may be utilized for non-custodial parents whose income does not exceed 200%. A referral process is currently in place between Child Support and Work First staff. The income would be verified at that time. Services offered may include education, work related expenses, case management, transportation and referrals to day care services. Transportation costs are only available to individuals who are employed. Priority for funds will be given to Work First participants, while funds for non-custodial parents will be used as the budget allows.

## **IX. Exemption from the Work Requirement**

Rutherford County will exempt a single parent for up to 6 months when they have a child under the age of one. We will count a maximum of 3 months from another county when the parent now lives in Rutherford County.

The exemption ends once the child reaches 6 months of age (i.e. Beginning with the 7<sup>th</sup> month the parent loses this exemption).

## **X. Innovative County Strategies**

Rutherford County is committed to the well being of its residents. This plan to reform welfare is intended to assist those who find themselves in a situation of financial need to become self-sufficient. The Work First Program does not foster dependency, but helps families realize their potential for self-sufficiency and achieve the advantages that independence from government income maintenance services offer.

The county is fortunate to have an excellent network between existing county, governmental and non-profit agencies and members of the business, education, health care, and religious communities. These include, but are not limited to, Isothermal Community College, the Isothermal Planning and Development Commission and the WIA Program, Family Resources, the Partnership for Children, Rutherford Hospital, American Red Cross, Rutherford County Schools, Habitat for Humanity, Forest City Housing Authority and Section 8 Housing.

Isothermal Community College offers a GED curriculum and an Adult High School Equivalency Degree Program. Rutherford County Schools offer the Even Start Program, which offers parents the opportunity to work toward their GED or high school diploma while their preschoolers attend Head Start. Parents are given opportunity during the day to interact with their children while progressing through their schoolwork. Even Start makes bi-monthly home visits to emphasize parenting skills, literacy in the home, and parent-child interaction. Work First participants are referred to these educational programs because of our emphasize on the role of education in achieving self-sufficiency

Family Resources, a United Way agency, administers several area programs including 2 local children's homes, an abused women's shelter, and an accredited Consumer Credit

Counseling office that offers financial management services to low-income families. Local benevolent organizations, including the Yokefellow Center, Corner Ministries and the Salvation Army, are also very active in providing assistance and services to those demonstrating need. First Call for Help is used as a referral service as they maintain a current list of all private and public resources available within the county.

Rutherford County DSS is home to an outstanding Career/Work Center, which offers training programs that focus on the basic skills needed to become job-ready.

Rutherford County's Plan acknowledges the reality that individuals and families cannot become self-sufficient unless a cycle of self-destructive behavior is broken. Accordingly, the Plan's administering agency will work closely with the Rutherford Center staff in identifying and treating substance abuse and with the Rutherford County Health Department to promote wellness, preventative health measures and responsible family planning.

Rutherford DSS makes referral to the Health Department for the following services:

- Case management for pregnant women and for families whose children are age birth to three
- Pregnancy prevention for teenagers
- Prenatal care
- Child birth education and parenting education
- Multi vitamin program to prevent birth defects
- Immunization and well check up for Work First families
- Dental Varnish Program

The Rutherford County Health Department also provides a dental hygiene program in the local schools. They recently received an award for the distribution of Multi-Vitamins through the March of Dimes.

Rutherford County DSS contracts with the CAMP (Children and Male Partnership) Program. This program promotes responsible fathering by inspiring men to be more involved in the lives of children. This goal is achieved through education, encouragement and creating community awareness about the importance of fathers in the healthy development of children. (See attachment V.)

Rutherford County operates a JobLink in Forest City. Referrals are made to the JobLink for employment opportunities, resume writing and Job Club meetings. Two Employment Social Workers are co-located at JobLink one full day a week. A resource room is also available at the JobLink, which includes: computers, newspapers, videos, software and books.

Rutherford County DSS offers a Domestic Violence Abuse Prevention Program. This is a 26-week program that works with the male abuser. Referrals are made from Work First workers, court officials and CPS workers.

Many of our Work First participants are involved in work experience with several of our community partners. These provide many opportunities for the participants to learn valuable work related skills.

Success for Families at Risk meets once a month to discuss Work First Participants who have received 30 months or more. We continually monitor on a monthly basis. The Success Team is made up of key partners of the JobLink Management Team.

## **XI.Special Issues**

Rutherford County's Work First caseload has drastically changed since 1996. Our main concerns are substance abuse, domestic violence and other mental health issues. We will use all available resources to ensure that the families get the help or treatment that they need. Families must face and overcome these critical issues in order to be productive members of the workforce and achieve self-sufficiency. All available resources will be used to this end.

## **XII. Certification**

I, Charles Hill, Chairman of the Board, do hereby certify that the Work First Plan 2003-2005 was approved with revisions at a meeting of the Rutherford County Board of Commissioners duly held on the \_\_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_, 2003.

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Charles Hill, Chairman  
Rutherford County Board of Commissioners

Attest:

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